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French Defense Policy

by

Steven T. Ross

Speaking at the Ecole Militaire on 3 November 1959, President Charles de Gaulle said that the Fifth Republic “had as its *raison d’être* . . . the defense of the nation’s independence and integrity. It is necessary that the defense of France be French.” He went on to explain that while the Republic remained loyal to the Atlantic alliance the nation would not place life or death decisions in the hands of others. States had the right and the obligation to exercise sovereign choice in matters of vital national interest.

De Gaulle realized that in order to restore French status as a major power he would have to end the Algerian war and complete decolonialization. The requirements of colonial warfare had drastically limited the Fourth Republic’s diplomatic and military options. Determined to escape from this trap, de Gaulle moved quickly to conclude the conflict in Algeria and granted independence to most French African colonies.

Simultaneously, he sought to restructure the Atlantic alliance to provide France with a larger independent role. In September 1958, he sent a memo to President Eisenhower proposing an arrangement wherein the United States, Great Britain, and France would coordinate global strategy and nuclear policy. At a press conference in 1960, he again advocated that America, England, and France take joint decisions on global problems.

When the Americans rejected his overtures, he turned his attention to an effort to reorder bloc politics. He criticized the bipolar global balance as dangerous since American-Soviet rivalry automatically transformed local issues around the world into major confrontations. He also raised serious questions about Washington’s resolve to defend Europe, pointing out that as Soviet nuclear capability grew there would be growing reluctance on the part of American leaders to place their homeland at risk to protect allies. The American policy of flexible response was in fact an effort to confine a central front war to Europe thus sparing American cities from nuclear destruction.

De Gaulle’s solution was to create a French-led third force in Europe which could act as an interlocator between the superpowers. In pursuit of this goal he signed a treaty with the Federal Republic of Germany in 1963 which included provisions for regular meetings of the heads of state as well as

constant military consultations. He then removed French forces from the Nato military command structure in 1966. While remaining within the political framework of the alliance, de Gaulle also undertook a policy of détente with Soviet Russia and the Warsaw Pact states. The domestic upheavals of 1968 coupled with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia put an end to the policy of seeking a systematic restructuring of global politics. De Gaulle reverted to trying to strengthen the West European community.

De Gaulle left office in 1969. He had not succeeded in creating a European third force, but he had reestablished France as a major autonomous power and had won the support of the great majority of Frenchmen for the policy of independence. France opposed both Atlantic and European integration. The Republic did back Washington in the Berlin and Cuban crises, but it did so as an independent actor. France also played a major role in the Common Market, recognizing the existence of interdependence but insisting on managing the terms of the process on the basis of sovereign choice. Great power status, autonomy and sovereignty of decision were de Gaulle's legacies to the nation.

De Gaulle's defense policy was designed to serve and sustain his diplomatic goals. The Fourth Republic had begun a nuclear weapons program. De Gaulle expanded it into the centerpiece of his new defense structure. By the early 1960s, France possessed a small arsenal of nuclear weapons and a doctrine for their employment. The doctrine of "dissuasion" called for the deployment of enough weapons to inflict destruction equal to or greater than the stake which France represented. In less elegant terms, "dissuasion" was a countervalue strategy designed, not to kill an opponent, but to tear off his arm. Dissuasion provided France with sanctuary from direct nuclear attack, and the very existence of a French nuclear arsenal made the Republic a force to be reckoned with by the superpowers.

The dissuasion doctrine also enabled de Gaulle to transform the conventional military from a counterinsurgency force into a modern structure destined to operate in Europe. The new missions included defense of the national frontiers, protection of nuclear and other vital installations, and low-level overseas intervention operations. Since the new missions were less manpower intensive than the counter guerrilla role, de Gaulle was able to reduce substantially the size and expense of the conventional forces while at the same time reconciling them to the loss of Algeria. The French military, not without some pain, turned the colonial page and began to focus on their new roles and missions.

Some military men sought to transform France into a nuclear Switzerland. Generals Ailleret and Gallois called for defense at all points of the compass, but to de Gaulle independence did not mean isolation. Even while rejecting Atlantic integration, France maintained large forces in Germany and continued to participate in Nato organizations ranging from the integrated

air defense system to the Atlantic Council. Sovereign independent France was in fact a loyal ally.

Before he left office de Gaulle noted that "everybody has been, is, or will be a Gaullist." The truth of his aphorism has been borne out by the foreign and defense policies of his successors. With remarkable consistency they have adhered to the concepts of an autonomous pro-Western France that reserves crucial decisions to its own sovereign choice.

Georges Pompidou, the second president of the Fifth Republic, once stated "all that counts is the independence of France, her role in Europe and her position in the world." He also publicly welcomed the presence of US troops in Europe as essential to the balance of power and French security. French land, sea, and air forces again joined Nato exercises. Moreover, the French government announced that for defense planning purposes the main threat to the Republic came from the east. Although the government retained a distinction between an attack on West Germany and one on France, it called for the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons to link conventional and strategic nuclear forces and advocated closer cooperation with the other alliance partners.

President Giscard also followed an independent but pro-Western policy. France refused to rejoin Nato's integrated military structure and maintained its independent deterrent designed to inflict more damage than the conquest of France was worth and to weaken decisively an aggressor in relation to the other superpower. Giscard also emphasized France's links to the alliance and stated "it would be illusory to hope that France could maintain more than a reduced sovereignty if its neighbors were occupied by a hostile power . . . the security of Western Europe as a whole is, therefore, essential to France."

General Mery, the Chief of Staff, elaborated on the dissuasion doctrine with the concept of extended sanctuary. Regular forces were not simply to defend French territory but also to engage an aggressor on the eastern approaches, thus blurring if not eliminating, the distinction between a Soviet attack on Germany and one on France.

Giscard placed new emphasis on close relations with the Federal Republic and in 1976 introduced legislation to modernize French conventional forces. General Gallois and others claimed that Giscard's defense policy marked a major departure from Gaullist doctrine and argued that France should continue to rely primarily on nuclear dissuasion and the exclusive protection of French territory. Giscard's supporters countered that extended sanctuary was fully consistent with Gaullist views and that independence did not imply neutrality or isolation. Given the extent of Soviet military expansion in the 1960s, and 1970s, France had to become more, not less, involved in the defense of Western Europe. In the Kanapa Report of 1977, the Communist Party also echoed Gallois' views. Seeking to separate France from the Atlantic alliance, the Communists advocated almost exclusive reliance on the Force de Frappe.

Their position was subject to the same refutation as that of Gallois, and Giscard's view prevailed.

Francois Mitterand has views on social and economic policy that differ substantially from those of his predecessors, but he has not changed French foreign or defense policy. On 14 September 1981, speaking at the Institute of High Defense Studies, he stated "France's powerful nuclear deterrent force makes an important contribution to the common defense of the alliance to which we belong and which we respect despite the fact that we are and must remain masters of our own decisions." The Premier, Pierre Mauroy, echoed these views in a speech delivered at the Institute on 20 September 1982, when he stated "National independence remains one of the pillars of our defense policy. It is based on the total freedom of decision concerning the use of our forces, on the sovereignty of choice and intention in military matters and on the autonomy of nuclear dissuasion." Mauroy went on to assert that although France would not rejoin the Nato military structure, the Republic was loyal to its allies, concerned with the security of neighboring states and assumed that "aggression against France does not commence only when the enemy crosses our frontiers." Defense minister Charles Hernu, writing in *Armees d'Aujourd Hui* Number 72, also noted that France was independent, loyal to its alliance partners and prepared to cooperate with them to counter aggression.

The Socialist assertion that an independent France is also loyal indicates the remarkable consensus on foreign policy created by de Gaulle. Critics of French policy abound both in France and abroad. Some want to adopt a semi-neutralist stance while others call for a reintegration into Nato. Most Frenchmen, however, appear to support the policy of an independent pro-Western orientation, and the Fifth Republic has created the forces required to sustain the nation's objectives.

France currently spends 3.9 percent of its gross national product on defense. The 1982 defense budget was \$26 billion, representing a real growth rate of 4 percent over the previous year. French defense spending has in fact been growing at about 3 to 4 percent annually since the late 1970s. The current worldwide recession has, of course, hurt France. Consequently, defense spending may be cut, but it is unlikely that spending reductions will be so substantial as to force fundamental changes in defense policy.

The French dissuasion policy is based on three types of forces: "strategic" nuclear, "tactical" nuclear and conventional. The conventional forces also play a role in French policy in the Third World. The roles and missions of each element of the Republic's defense establishment are linked together to form a coherent posture.

"Strategic" nuclear forces are, according to Charles Hernu, designed "to dissuade all significant aggression against France and its vital interests." They are a guarantee against a direct nuclear attack on French territory and contribute to the Republic's efforts to extend its nuclear sanctuary eastward.

All three services play a role in the "strategic" nuclear force structure. The Army controls eighteen intermediate-range ballistic missiles, each armed with a single one-megaton warhead. The missiles are located in the Albion Plateau region of central France. About 2,800 men operate the IRBMs. The Air Force contributes 12,000 men and thirty-three Mirage IV-A bombers. The Mirage carries the AN22 gravity bomb with a seventy-kiloton warhead. There are also eleven KC135 tankers and ten bombers in storage. The Navy operates five nuclear submarines, each with sixteen missiles. About 5,500 men run the SSBNs. A sixth missile boat is under construction. She will have Mirved missiles with six warheads each, and the other submarines will be retrofitted with the new M4 missile. A seventh SSBN has been funded.

The Force de Frappe is a second-strike countervalue force. The land-based missiles are vulnerable to a preemptive strike, and the bombers would be hard pressed to penetrate Soviet air defenses. The SSBNs are reasonably safe, and two are always at sea. The French are planning a mobile land-based missile, the SX, and a new air-to-ground missile for the Mirage IV-As which will be replaced by a more advanced bomber. When the seventh SSBN enters service, the Navy will be able to keep three on patrol.

Despite the need for modernization, the French nuclear force poses a real threat to an aggressor. By the late 1980s the SSBNs alone will be able to threaten over 200 Soviet cities. Using conservative calculations, all systems will be able to hold at risk over 400 targets. Obviously it is impossible to define precisely how much is enough, but a superpower seeking to destroy France would emerge from a conflict decisively weaker than its main opponent. The French countervalue deterrent strategy appears to be credible.

"Tactical" nuclear forces form the link between "strategic" nuclear and conventional warfare. Their use against a massive conventional attack acts as a final solemn warning that if the assault does not cease, the war will change dimensions since France will unleash its "strategic" forces sooner than accept defeat. "Tactical" and "strategic" nuclear warfare are explicitly coupled. The French thus have an alternative to an all-or-nothing reaction while at the same time rejecting graduated response.

All services contribute to the "tactical" nuclear arsenal. The Army maintains five Pluton regiments, each with six mobile launchers. A Pluton has a twenty-kiloton warhead with a sixty-mile range. The regiments are located in northeastern France, ready to operate near the frontier or on the soil of the Federal Republic of Germany. The Air Force element consists of thirty Mirage III-E and thirty Jaguar-A fighter-bombers armed with a nuclear gravity bomb, the AN-52, with a twenty-kiloton warhead, and the naval element consists of twenty-four Super Etendard fighter-bombers also armed with the AN-52. The Air Force units serve in eastern France while the naval "tactical" nuclear forces focus on the Republic's Mediterranean flank.

The French are seeking to improve their "tactical" nuclear capabilities. A new ground-to-ground missile, the Hades, will later in this decade replace the Pluton. With its longer range, the Hades will be able to strike targets in Eastern Europe from French soil. President Mitterand has also decided to continue research on enhanced radiation weapons although he has not yet undertaken to deploy them. The Republic is evidently serious about linking "strategic" nuclear, "tactical" nuclear, and conventional warfare and has displayed a willingness to devote the resources necessary to have credible nuclear forces. France is the third nuclear power in the world and intends to maintain its position.

The Republic's conventional, or as the French call them classical forces, have a dual role. They participate in the structure of dissuasion and also promote and sustain France's interests in the Third World.

The defense minister described the mission of classical forces in the following terms "to defend, alone or with our partners in the Atlantic alliance in case of conflict not suitable to nuclear dissuasion." In addition to countering limited thrusts, classical forces are also to meet a major enemy attack as the first step in the dissuasion process. Their mission is to encounter the aggressor and inflict losses, thereby both demonstrating the will to resist and giving the government time to evaluate enemy intentions and the overall politico-military situation. If the enemy does not halt, the president can escalate the conflict by resort to "tactical" nuclear weapons. The dissuasion doctrine poses a difficult problem for a potential Soviet aggressor who must calculate not only Nato's response to a Central Front attack but also the French reaction.

The French armed forces are raised by universal conscription. A draftee serves for one year. He then goes into the active reserve for four years and spends the next thirteen in the general reserve. About 425,000 young men become eligible for service each year, and about 75 percent of them are drafted. There is relatively little conscientious objection, and those who do not serve usually have been rejected on physical or mental grounds.

Virtually the entire political spectrum supports conscription. The Right favors it because they believe that military service teaches patriotic virtues. The Left believes that the draft maintains the republican character of the military. Professional officers also support conscription. It provides the necessary manpower and keeps the military in touch with the mainstream of French society.

Individuals and parties often criticize aspects of the conscription system. One common complaint is that a single year of active service is not long enough to train and employ usefully technical specialists and too long for less complex tasks. The Mitterand government is examining this issue, but despite specific criticisms, the vast majority of the French public accepts the concept of a citizen military.

The Army numbers 314,200 men. The order of battle consists of an army headquarters, three corps headquarters, eight armored divisions, two mechanized divisions, two motorized infantry divisions, an Alpine division, a parachute division and a marine infantry division.* Each corps has a logistics brigade, an artillery brigade, and a variety of attached regiments including reconnaissance, signals, artillery, antiaircraft, engineer and transport units. There are about forty corps regiments. Additionally, there are about twenty-five independent regiments. The Army can in an emergency raise fourteen reserve infantry divisions.

French divisions, in contrast to American and other European formations are small. They are designed for great mobility and high firepower. An armored division has 7,000 men and consists of two tank, two mechanized infantry, one artillery, one engineer, and one logistics regiment. A French regiment contains about 800 men, the size of an American battalion. There is also an antitank company. The division has 148 battle tanks, 245 armored personnel carriers, twenty-four 155 mm self-propelled artillery pieces, and fifty antitank missile launchers. A mechanized division has 6,900 men and consists of three infantry and one tank regiment as well as artillery, logistics, and engineer units. The division has thirty-six tanks and 370 APCs. It also contains twenty-four howitzers and eighty-four antitank missile launchers. The marine infantry and parachute divisions are somewhat larger since they control units that may be assigned overseas. The Alpine division is also somewhat larger than the standard infantry formation because of its unique characteristics and mission.

The First Army is located in eastern France to counter the perceived threat from Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces. It controls the three army corps. One corps, the Second, is situated in the German Federal Republic and has three armored divisions. The First Corps, with four armored divisions, is located along the Franco-German border, and the Third Corps, near Paris, has the other armored division. The mechanized infantry divisions are stationed near the Belgian frontier and can quickly reinforce the First Army. The other divisions can in wartime act as an immediate reserve or provide local security for critical installations.

For operations overseas, the Republic maintains an exterior action force, recently renamed the Rapid Assistance Force for reasons of socialist ideology. The force is task organized and can call on some 13 regiments and battalions including some of the regiments of the parachute and marine divisions. Each of these divisions contains long service troops who are ready on short notice to operate outside of the Metropole. The French also have a number of independent regiments; an amphibious brigade, consisting of three or four battalions based in Southern France; and the Foreign Legion

*This division is located in Brittany where occasionally it can take advantage of training with the Navy's amphibious force. Identified as the 9th Infantry Division, it is definitely a part of the Army.

regiments (the last-named totalling 8,000 men) for overseas operations. Though the Rapid Assistance Force might reach the area needing its help by means of amphibious ships, most often its units have been flown in. Unfortunately, however, France's 40 KC-135s are too few for the need.

France has 9,800 men in its colonies. Currently, there are four regiments in the Antilles, three in the Indian Ocean and three in the Pacific. Some of these units could assist forces dispatched from the home country.

Finally, the Republic maintains forces in several African countries where France has historic strategic and economic interests. There are over 3,000 troops in Djibouti; 1,700 in Senegal, and smaller contingents in several other states. These forces can work with the Rapid Assistance regiments in many parts of Africa and the Middle East.

France supplements its Army with a large paramilitary force—the National Gendarmerie which is controlled by the defense minister and is 83,000 men strong. Some 43,500 gendarmes serve in the departments, backed by 18,500 men in mobile units. There are 2,900 gendarmes overseas, a Republican Guard to provide security for leading government figures, and other units to guard airfields and ports. The Gendarmerie is well equipped with small arms and possesses over 300 light armored vehicles.

The Gendarmerie's wartime missions are to cope with guerrilla and sabotage operations and to secure military bases and lines of communication. The Gendarmerie has also developed a counter-terrorist capability. It was, for example, a Gendarmerie unit that cleared the terrorists out of the Grand Mosque at Mecca after Saudi forces failed to dislodge them.

The Army appears to be well trained and well organized. Its equipment, including 1,100 medium tanks, 340 light tanks, 1,000 armored cars, 3,000 APC variants, and 330 artillery pieces, meets the most exacting standards. Moreover, new self-propelled guns and upgraded engineering equipment are on order.

The Mitterand government is contemplating the creation of a new army corps designed for rapid deployment in Europe. It will consist of several regiments of antitank helicopters, infantry divisions organized and trained to fight against armored formations in an urbanized environment, and a light armored division. The new corps will replace two conventional armored divisions. Its mission will be to intervene in a Central Front battle at any point where reinforcements are required rather than operating exclusively in Southern Germany. The two mechanized infantry divisions will probably replace the armored units in the First Army's order of battle.

Fiscal problems may have an adverse impact on future defense budgets. The Army, in an unusual move which has led to the removal of the Chief of the Army Staff, has complained publicly that the government is planning to cut 30,000 men. Mitterand has not yet presented his four year military spending plan, but it is possible that there will be reductions if not of manpower then in the rate of equipment acquisition.

The Army, nevertheless, appears capable of accomplishing its essential missions. It is structured to wage a short high-intensity conflict on the Central Front. The Army has supplies, munitions, and manpower to fight for about two weeks, enough time to demonstrate national resolve and to justify resort to "tactical" nuclear weapons sooner than capitulate or collapse. The overseas intervention forces are capable of responding quickly to Third World crises and have done so effectively on many occasions. Their major current problem is a shortage of transport and logistics aircraft and ships, but the Rapid Assistance Force can be quite effective in a low-level conflict.

The Air Force has a strength of 100,400 men. The air defense command consists of ten interceptor squadrons with a total of 165 combat aircraft. The tactical air force has five strike, twelve ground attack, and three reconnaissance squadrons, with 255 combat aircraft. The training command has about 400 aircraft, and the transport command contains six tactical support squadrons, fourteen light transport squadrons and five helicopter squadrons.

The Air Force deploys mainly to the northeastern parts of France. The Tactical Air Force mission is to operate in close support of the First Army. Some squadrons serve abroad on a rotational basis. French aircraft rank among the world's best and are widely sold abroad. The Air Force is also seeking a new generation of air superiority fighters and ground attack aircraft. Fiscal problems may prolong the acquisition process, but nonetheless, the Air Force seems able to participate effectively in the nation's defense.

The Navy consists of 68,000 officers and enlisted personnel. Among this number about 18,000 are conscripts. About 12,000 of the 68,000 serve in naval aviation.

In addition to the SSBN force, the Navy has one nuclear-powered attack submarine and 20 diesel-electric attack submarines; two carriers, each capable of serving as either a CVA or a CVS and in either case embarking about 40 aircraft; a training cruiser which can also serve as a helicopter cruiser; and a guided-missile cruiser. There are 21 destroyers (six of them DDGs), 20 frigates of various sizes, 23 oceangoing and coastal minesweepers and minehunters, and nine amphibious ships (two LSDs, five LSTs, and two LSMs). Though the number of auxiliaries is large, it includes only four underway replenishment ships.

In addition to the pair of SSBNs under construction, there are four SSNs, seven destroyers (three of them DDGs), six small frigates, and 15 minehunters under construction.

The active air units include 36 Super Etendard attack aircraft, seven Etendard IV reconnaissance aircraft, 15 F8E Crusader fighters, 20 Alizé carrier-based antisubmarine aircraft, and 28 Atlantic and 12 Neptune patrol planes. Among helicopters are 15 Super Frelons, 21 Lynx, and three Alouette.

New Super Etendards, Atlantics, and Lynx are being built and a number of older aircraft are held in reserve.

The largest part of the fleet is in the Mediterranean, where the Navy has both carriers, twelve of the submarines, thirteen destroyers, and a host of other ships. Most of the remaining ships, including the SSBNs, are in the Atlantic. The Indian Ocean detachment usually consists of a flagship, five destroyers or frigates, some minesweepers, and a small number of logistic ships. A few ships serve in the South Pacific where France still has some island territories. When France conducts nuclear tests near Tahiti the number of French warships assigned to the Pacific grows.

Naval units are modern and well designed. They can provide reasonably adequate protection for SSBN cruising areas and can protect the coastlines against all but the largest assaults. The Navy can also support the Rapid Assistance Force although a shortage of logistics ships remains a problem. The Navy, however, ran a successful exercise with the Special Intervention Brigade in October 1981, and is generally able to play its role not only in dissuasion but also in the protection of the Republic's global interests.

France has a large armaments industry that employs over 250,000 people and is one of the world's leading arms exporters, accounting for over 10 percent of the world's arms sales. France can and does produce almost all of its own military equipment from pistols to nuclear missiles. The French do undertake joint production ventures with other states, but the Republic is fundamentally self-sufficient in armaments.

Though fully independent, France continues to cooperate closely with the Atlantic alliance. Profoundly anti-Soviet, the Mitterand government will probably continue in a close working relationship with the Western powers.

The Republic currently supports the American initiative to modernize its theater nuclear forces and encourages other Western governments to accept improved American Pershing rockets and cruise missiles to balance the Soviet SS-20s.

In Germany, the French Second Corps participates in Nato exercises. American and French divisions periodically exchange units and have devised a common communications manual. In Brussels the French have observer status on the Nato Defense Planning Committee as well as an accredited ambassador on the Atlantic Council. There are also French observers on the various Nato military committees and commands.

The French jointly produce a wide variety of weapon systems with a number of Nato members. The Milan and Hot antitank launchers and missiles are co-produced with the Federal Republic as is the Roland anti-aircraft system. With Great Britain, France jointly produces the Martel anti-aircraft missile, the Jaguar jet and the Gazelle and Lynx helicopters. France is constructing a tactical communications network with Belgium and is engaged in a naval minehunter program with Belgium and the Netherlands.

France buys parts for its Mirage jets from Belgium and Spain, and components of the Exocet missile are purchased from England.

At sea, French naval units participate in Nato exercises and work closely with the American Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. There are French representatives on the various Nato naval staffs, and there is good cooperation in the Indian Ocean between the French and American squadrons. There is also significant technical cooperation in the Franco-American effort to build up Saudi naval strength, and French officers attend a variety of American naval schools, ranging from technical training institutions to the Naval War College. The French Navy is well prepared to participate in the collective defense of Western Europe and to cooperate with allies in other parts of the world.

Other areas of cooperation include co-located air force bases with the Canadians and plans for Allied use of French ports and transportation facilities in case of a Central Front war. In the Third World, France has defense agreements with fifteen African states and has intervened militarily more than a dozen times. On one occasion, the US Air Force brought Foreign Legion units into Zaire to quell unrest in Shaba Province.

Currently there are numerous areas in which the French are willing to cooperate with their Atlantic allies. The co-production of weapon systems will doubtless continue, as will the whole range of joint exercises and joint contingency planning. The French Navy has unofficially expressed interest in obtaining American technology in return for US naval access to French ports for repairs and resupply.

In Third World areas, the French have also expressed unofficial interest in greater cooperation with the United States, a muted revival of de Gaulle's 1958 proposal. The French are willing to act against Libyan adventurism in sub-Saharan Africa but require logistical support. There appears to be an excellent opportunity to devise practical arrangements to support the Rapid Assistance Force, and such arrangements would have the additional benefit of keeping local issues below the level of bloc confrontations. The world recognizes that the French have been involved in Africa for centuries and still have interests on that continent. Their intervention would be done on a low level and would not be viewed as a cold war initiative.

Southwest Asia is another vital region that offers possibilities of fruitful cooperation. France, like other Western powers, has significant interests in the region, including the sale of arms and the importation of petroleum. French training teams currently operate in Saudi Arabia, and there are over 150 French tanks in storage near the Yemen border. The garrison in Djibouti and the Indian Ocean squadron are well located to intervene throughout the area. As in the case of Africa, local powers are less afraid of French than of American intervention because French intervention would not necessarily become part of the US-Soviet rivalry.

In a number of circumstances, including a South Yemenese attack on the Saudis, a Saudi civil war, or an Iranian attack on one or more of the Gulf states, French intervention with American logistical support might be effective. With proper support, the French could get to a threatened area quickly from Djibouti, and the Rapid Assistance Force could follow with little delay. Arrangements for intervention would also relieve the burden that the United States with its cumbersome RDJTF is trying to bear unilaterally.

Relations between Washington and Paris are not of course perfect. There are substantial differences over Latin American and Middle East policy. The two republics also disagree over trade with the east bloc. Both nations are plagued by the world recession, and economic problems may exacerbate differences over tariff and trade issues. On the other hand, France does support the United States on the fundamental issue of force expansion to meet the growing Soviet threat.

France is and will seek to remain a sovereign major power with European and worldwide interests. France has constructed a defense policy to sustain its diplomatic stance. The Republic makes a significant contribution to the defense of the Atlantic alliance. The French will not rejoin the Nato military command nor agree to European integration. Nor is it likely that they will retreat into isolation. The Republic will probably retain its strong pro-Western orientation, and the Atlantic alliance finds this stance beneficial. Moreover, there are many areas where cooperation with the Allies can be usefully expanded on the basis of mutual interest. The Fifth Republic thus plays a vital role in the defense of the West.

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Past is Prelude

"When faced with a twenty-year threat, Government responds with a fifteen-year program in the five-year defense plan, managed by three-year personnel, funded with single-year-appropriations which are typically three to six months late."

—Anonymous